

In the early 1920's, however, all-weather road surfaces paved the way for a then-infant trucking industry, and the demand for packet boats decreased dramatically. In search of a new type of passenger trade, the "Idlewild" was converted to service as an excursion boat, and she "tramped" her way along the Ohio, Illinois, Mississippi, and Missouri river systems - stopping at a town along the banks, running short trips

for a few days, then moving on up or down the river to another town. To fill out the coffers of her owners, she often carried cargo picked up in one town and delivered to another.

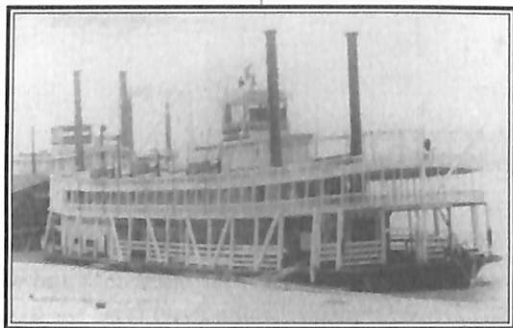
Sometime during this decade, and to make her more visually appealing for the excursion trade, the "Idlewild's" Texas cabin (on the third deck) was lengthened to accommodate more crew members, awnings

were added to cover the exterior decks, and Victorian "gingerbread" trim decorated the newly-enlarged Texas deck roof.

A notable turn of events came in 1930 after Louisville's excursion boat, the "America", burned beyond use just after Labor Day. Under charter to the

Rose Island Company, the "Idlewild" made her first trip to the area in 1931 to spend that season running trips

from Louisville to Fontaine Ferry Amusement Park (near downtown) and Rose Island, about 14 miles upriver from Louisville. A few independent businessmen had built a thriving entertainment concern on a small section of land just above Fourteen Mile Creek on the Indiana shoreline, and fun-loving passengers traveled back and forth between Louisville and the two amusement parks just as young people today move mercurially from one source of entertainment to another.



Idlewild - 1914

That charter was the beginning of a long-standing association between the boat and the "Derby City"; and though she traveled a vagabond's life for another two years, in 1934, ready to settle down and looking for a home port, the "Idlewild" returned to Louisville to operate a regular excursion schedule through World War II.

A Brief "Military Career"

During the 1940's when everyone's help was needed to aid the war effort, though the "Idlewild" continued her excursion trade during the summer, she towed oil barges (an affectionate misnomer, as barges on the river are "pushed", not "pulled") up and down the Mississippi River during the "off season". She had to be specially-rigged for the work, since her sloping and pointed bow was not designed for pushing boats ahead of her; so she was fitted out with a set of "tow knees" - two 4'-long vertical steel beams attached to either side of the bow - that provided a surface for pressing against the flat ends of the barges and making them easier to propel and control.

Not one to miss any chance to "show off," the boat was also used by the U.S.O. as a floating nightspot for troops stationed at military bases along the Mississippi.

She Takes On A New Name

The "Idlewild" served 33 years under her original name, but change was in store for her when she was sold in 1947 to J. Herod Gorsage. Though the "Idlewild" was destined to remain under that ownership only a short two years, during 1948 she was renamed the "Avalon" to honor the deathbed wish of the man who was then her Master, Ben Winters. Captain Winters had begun his long river career aboard a steamer with that name, and he hoped the "Avalon" would be remembered.

She was sold in 1949 to a group of investors in Cincinnati, Ohio, and during the next 13 years the "Avalon" became the most widely-traveled river steamer of her size on

